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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ROME 000721

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR BURNS BRIEFS ITALIANS ON NATO ISSUES

CLASSIFIED BY: DCM WILLIAM POPE FOR REASONS 1.5(B), (D)

1. (C) SUMMARY. US AMBASSADOR TO NATO NICK BURNS DISCUSSED TASK FORCE FOX, NATO-EU AND NATO-RUSSIA RELATIONS, ENLARGEMENT AND THE BALKANS IN A SERIES OF MEETINGS WITH THE ITALIAN DEFENSE MINISTER, OTHER SENIOR ITALIAN OFFICIALS, JOURNALISTS AND POLITICAL LEADERS WHILE IN ROME FEBRUARY 7 AND 8. BURNS RAISED USG CONCERNS ABOUT THE WIDENING CAPABILITIES GAP WITH NATO ALLIES, AND ADDRESSED ITALIAN QUESTIONS REGARDING US UNILATERALISM AND THE FIGHT AGAINST  
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TERRORISM. DEFMIN ANTONIO MARTINO TOLD BURNS THAT ITALY IS PREPARED TO TAKE COMMAND OF TFF FOR UP TO SIX MONTHS, SHOULD THAT BE NECESSARY. HE NOTED THAT EU DEFENSE MINISTERS DO NOT SHARE THE ENTHUSIASM OF EU FOREIGN MINISTERS FOR A FOLLOW-ON EU COMMAND FOR TFF. ITALIAN OFFICIALS ALSO EXPLORED THE IDEA OF TIMING A CELEBRATION OF THE CREATION OF THE NATO-RUSSIA COUNCIL TO COINCIDE WITH PRESIDENT BUSH'S TRIP TO MOSCOW IN LATE MAY. BURNS SUGGESTED THAT POLDIR ARAGONA RAISE THE ISSUE DURING HIS FEBRUARY 11-12 VISIT TO WASHINGTON. END SUMMARY.

DEFMIN MARTINO

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2. (C) WHILE IN ROME TO GIVE THE GRADUATION SPEECH AT THE NATO DEFENSE COLLEGE, USNATO AMBASSADOR BURNS MET WITH DEFENSE MINISTER MARTINO AND OTHER SENIOR ITALIAN OFFICIALS FROM THE MFA, MOD, PRIME MINISTER'S AND PRESIDENT'S OFFICE, AS WELL AS JOURNALISTS AND POLITICAL LEADERS, IN A SERIES OF MEETINGS AND ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS. IN A FEBRUARY 8 MEETING, DEFMIN MARTINO CONFIRMED THAT ITALY IS PREPARED TO TAKE THE LEAD ON TFF FOR UP TO SIX MONTHS, IF REQUESTED. MARTINO AGREED WITH BURNS THAT THE SITUATION IN MACEDONIA IS FLUID AND ADMITTED THAT WORKING WITH THE MACEDONIANS CAN BE UNPREDICTIBLE. BURNS SAID THE USG WILL SUPPORT AN EXTENSION OF TFF FOR THREE TO FOUR MONTHS, BUT WOULD NEED TO REVIEW AN EXTENSION OF SIX MONTHS. THE US IS OPEN TO DISCUSSING A SHIFT IN COMMAND FROM NATO TO THE EU, SHOULD THE MANDATE NEED TO BE EXTENDED AGAIN, BUT HAD NOT MADE ANY FIRM DECISIONS, BURNS SAID. HE POINTED OUT THAT, AT NATO, BRITAIN, GERMANY AND THE NETHERLANDS ARE RELUCTANT TO SUPPORT AN EU COMMAND UNTIL ALL THE BERLIN-PLUS ARRANGEMENTS HAVE BEEN MET. MARTINO  
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NOTED THAT, UNLIKE THE "FOREIGN MINISTERS' CLUB," THE "DEFENSE MINISTERS' CLUB" IS STRONGLY OPPOSED TO SHIFTING COMMAND FROM NATO TO THE EU.

3. (C) BURNS COMMENTED ON THE DISTURBING CAPABILITIES GAP BETWEEN THE US AND NATO ALLIES, AND POINTED TO LORD ROBERTSON'S SUGGESTION TO PARE DOWN THE DCI'S 58 SPENDING PRIORITIES TO A MORE MANAGEABLE FIVE OR SIX. IF THE CORE NATO ALLIES FOCUSED ON DEVELOPING CAPABILITIES SUCH AS STRATEGIC LIFT, SPECIAL OPS FORCES, PRECISION GUIDED MUNITIONS AND SECURE COMMUNICATIONS, NATO WOULD HAVE THE FLEXIBILITY TO RESPOND TO ASYMMETRICAL THREATS AS WELL AS CONVENTIONAL ONES. MARTINO, AN ECONOMIST BY TRAINING, ADMITTED THAT EUROPE HAS HAD A FREE RIDE FROM THE US FOR THE PAST 50 YEARS. INCREASED DEFENSE SPENDING WILL HAVE TO BE FINANCED BY INCREASED TAXATION -- NOT A PALATABLE OPTION, MARTINO SAID. NATO NOT ONLY NEEDS TO REDUCE ITS PRIORITIES, ITS MEMBERS NEED TO SPEND AVAILABLE FUNDS MORE EFFICIENTLY, HE SAID. ALONG THESE LINES, MARTINO NOTED THE IMPORTANCE OF ITALY'S PARTICIPATION IN JOINT STRIKE FIGHTER, AND ADDED THAT JSF IS AN OPPORTUNITY ITALY CAN'T AFFORD TO MISS. HE AGREED THAT ITALIAN INDUSTRY DEMANDS ARE STALLING COMPLETION OF THE DEAL, AND SAID NATIONAL ARMAMENTS DIRECTOR ADMIRAL DIPAOALA MAY MAKE SOME HEADWAY WHILE IN WASHINGTON DURING THE WEEK OF FEBRUARY 11.

4. (C) MARTINO ADMITTED THAT NATO ENLARGEMENT WILL BE A CHALLENGE BUT TOLD BURNS THAT BRINGING ROMANIA AND BULGARIA IN IS IMPORTANT FOR THE BALKANS REGION. THEY WANT TO FEEL A PART OF THE DEMOCRATIC COMMUNITY AT LARGE, AND IT WILL BE HARD FOR THEM TO BE LEFT BEHIND IF SLOVENIA AND SLOVAKIA ARE  
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ADMITTED, MARTINO SAID. BURNS EXPLAINED THAT THE USG WANTS TO DELAY DECIDING WHICH COUNTRIES WILL BE ADMITTED UNTIL LATE FALL IN ORDER TO GIVE CANDIDATES AS MUCH TIME AS POSSIBLE TO MAKE THE NECESSARY REFORMS.

POLDIR ARAGONA

15. (C) AMBASSADOR BURNS HEARD A SIMILAR MESSAGE ON ENLARGEMENT FROM MFA POLITICAL DIRECTOR GIANCARLO ARAGONA DURING A FEBRUARY 7 MEETING. ARAGONA SAID ADMITTING TWO OR SEVEN OF THE NINE ASPIRANTS WOULD BE ACCEPTABLE BUT ADMITTING FIVE WOULD BE DIFFICULT. STRENGTHENING SE EUROPE IS A SIGNIFICANT NATIONAL INTEREST FOR ITALY, HE SAID. ALBANIA AND MACEDONIA ARE NOT READY FOR MEMBERSHIP, BUT BRINGING ROMANIA AND BULGARIA IN WOULD STABILIZE THE REGION AND HELP SPUR NECESSARY REFORMS. BURNS NOTED THAT AN INTERAGENCY TEAM WOULD BE TRAVELING TO THE ASPIRANT COUNTRIES IN FEBRUARY TO EVALUATE HOW TO HELP THEM TOWARD MEMBERSHIP.

16. (C) IN CONTRAST TO MARTINO, ARAGONA SAID THAT ITALY SUPPORTS AN EU COMMAND OF TFF EVENTUALLY, AS A TEST OF EU-NATO SYNERGY. IF ALLIES AGREE TO ADHERE TO THE PRINCIPLES

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ACTION EUR-00

INFO LOG-00 NP-00 AMAD-00 ACQ-00 CIAE-00 INL-00 DODE-00  
DS-00 VC-00 TEDE-00 INR-00 VCE-00 NSAE-00 PM-00  
IRM-00 SSO-00 SS-00 EPAE-00 SNIS-00 NISC-00 PMB-00  
DSCC-00 NFAT-00 SAS-00 /000W  
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O 131322Z FEB 02  
FM AMEMBASSY ROME  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2119  
INFO ALL NATO POST COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE  
AMEMBASSY SKOPJE IMMEDIATE

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OF BERLIN-PLUS, IT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE TO SHIFT TO AN EU COMMAND EVEN IF A FORMAL AGREEMENT IS NOT IN PLACE, ARAGONA SUGGESTED. BURNS NOTED USG WILLINGNESS TO DISCUSS EU COMMAND OF TFF. WITH ARAGONA AND OTHERS, HE EMPHASIZED THE NEED FOR THE EU TO DISCUSS ITS AMBITIONS NOT ONLY INTERNALLY BUT ALSO DIRECTLY WITH THE MACEDONIANS.

17. (C) ARAGONA TOLD BURNS THAT PRIME MINISTER BERLUSCONI SHARES PRESIDENT BUSH'S ENTHUSIASM FOR IMPROVED NATO-RUSSIA RELATIONS. ARAGONA SAID BERLUSCONI FAVORS HOLDING AN EVENT  
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TO CELEBRATE THE CREATION OF THE NATO-RUSSIA COUNCIL AFTER THE NATO FM'S MEETING IN REYKJAVIK. ON FEBRUARY 4, DEFMIN MARTINO HAD REPEATED AN EARLIER ITALIAN INVITATION TO HOST SUCH AN EVENT. ASSEMBLING A HIGH-LEVEL MEETING MIGHT BE EASIER IF IT WERE TIMED TO COINCIDE WITH PRESIDENT BUSH'S TRIP TO MOSCOW MAY 23-26, ARAGONA SAID. BURNS NOTED THAT THE US BELIEVED IT TOO EARLY TO MAKE A DECISION ABOUT SUCH A SUMMIT AND SUGGESTED ARAGONA MENTION IT DURING HIS UPCOMING VISIT. OTHER POSSIBLE DATES FOR AN INAUGURAL EVENT ARE THE REYKJAVIK FM'S MEETING MAY 14-16 OR THE FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOUNDING ACT ON MAY 27, BURNS SAID. THE CZECH'S WERE LIKELY TO OBJECT TO HOLDING AN EVENT TOO CLOSE TO THE PRAGUE SUMMIT IN NOVEMBER, HE NOTED.

18. (C) BURNS' LUNCHEON WITH SENIOR GOI OFFICIALS FEATURED SIMILAR THEMES. PARTICIPANTS INCLUDED PRESIDENT CIAMPI'S SENIOR DIPLOMATIC ADVISOR, PURI PURINI; PM BERLUSCONI'S SENIOR MILITARY ADVISOR, GEN. TRICARICO; MOD DIPLOMATIC ADVISOR GRECO; VICE CHOD CAMPORINI; AND MFA SENIOR SECURITY ADVISOR PENZA. THERE WAS GENERAL AGREEMENT THAT NATO COUNTRIES NEED TO INCREASE DEFENSE SPENDING AND SPEND THOSE FUNDS MORE EFFICIENTLY. THE OFFICIALS ALSO AGREED THAT NATO NEEDS TO BE ABLE TO RESPOND MORE FLEXIBLY TO UNCONVENTIONAL THREATS AS WELL AS TO THE CONVENTIONAL THREATS THAT HAVE BEEN THE BASIS FOR THE ALLIANCE. GENERAL CAMPORINI NOTED THAT COMMAND STRUCTURE LIMITATIONS MAKE IT DIFFICULT FOR NATO TO DEPLOY TROOPS QUICKLY. IN DISCUSSING TFF COMMAND, CAMPORINI FLOATED THE IDEA THAT ITALY COULD ASSUME COMMAND OF TFF UNDER A NATO FLAG, AND THAT THE TRANSITION TO AN EU MISSION COULD COME AT THE HALFWAY POINT OF THE ITALIAN COMMAND.

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19. (C) THROUGHOUT AMB. BURNS' MEETINGS, GOI OFFICIALS SENT A CLEAR AND CONSISTENT MESSAGE OF A CLOSE ALLY THAT IS FULLY WILLING -- AND AT TIMES EAGER -- TO WORK MORE CLOSELY WITH THE US ON POL-MIL AFFAIRS. BUILDING UPON ONGOING SUPPORT FOR OEF AND THE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT'S CLOSE COLLABORATION DURING

THE KOSOVO CAMPAIGN, KEY PLAYERS IN BERLUSCONI'S GOVERNMENT ARE SEEKING AVENUES OF COOPERATION RANGING FROM MD TO NATO-RUSSIA TO DEFENSE-INDUSTRIAL COOPERATION. SUCH OPPORTUNITIES HAVE THEIR LIMITS, AS THE CENTER-RIGHT GOI PURSUES ITS OWN CONCEPT OF NATIONAL SELF-INTEREST. BUT THEY ARE REAL. WITH THE GOI'S DEEPENING SENSE THAT KEY EUROPEAN "PARTNERS" ARE UNWILLING TO GIVE ITALY ITS DUE, THE US HAS A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO FOSTER EVEN CLOSER GOI-USG COOPERATION, BOTH WITHIN THE ALLIANCE AND BILATERALLY.

110. (U) AMBASSADOR BURNS HAS CLEARED THIS MESSAGE.  
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